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# Healthy Families ILLINOIS

An illustration of a family walking. A man in a dark blue shirt and shorts is walking towards the right, holding the hand of a young boy in a white and blue soccer uniform. The boy is holding the hand of a young girl in a blue and white soccer uniform. They are walking on a yellow path.

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## Information for Community Leaders





## What is Healthy Families Illinois?

Healthy Families Illinois (HFI) is a voluntary program of home visiting to support families and reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect. It is modeled after Healthy Families America,<sup>®</sup> a national initiative of Prevent Child Abuse America.

## Why do we need Healthy Families Illinois?

Successful parenting is difficult for all families in today's society. However, when parents struggle with isolation, unemployment, a childhood history of abuse and neglect, unrealistic expectations of the new baby or other factors, children can become the unintended victims of their frustration and inexperience.

Young children are at greatest risk. Each year, about one-fourth of the children who are abused or neglected and nearly two-thirds of the children who die from abuse or neglect are under 3 years of age.

Healthy Families Illinois has three goals:

- Promote positive parenting.
- Encourage child health and development.
- Prevent child abuse and neglect.

The program seeks to achieve these goals through voluntary home visits that help families develop their parenting skills. HFI programs also ensure that families are linked to health care services, including scheduled immunizations and well-child checks.

## How does HFI work?

Healthy Families Illinois services begin during pregnancy or at the time of a child's birth. A family assessment worker meets with interested families to determine if HFI services are appropriate for the family. Once families agree to accept services, a trained family support worker makes weekly home visits. The duration and frequency of home visits vary according to the needs of the family.

The purpose of the home visit is to create a relationship that promotes healthy child development, strengthens the parent-child relationship, supports parents as children's first teachers and reduces family isolation. The family support worker teaches and models good parenting skills and encourages parent/child interactions. Home visiting services are culturally-relevant, comprehensive and family-centered. Participation by the entire family is encouraged.

Home visitors work with no more than 25 families at a time so that adequate time can be spent with each family.

Family support workers receive clinical supervision from trained and licensed managers who provide guidance, education and support.

HFI works with existing community programs to avoid duplication of home visiting services. Community support and collaboration in program design and operation are crucial to the program's success.

## How is HFI funded?

Healthy Families Illinois programs receive funding from the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS), the Ounce of Prevention Fund and the communities in which they operate.

Local communities are expected to help support their HFI programs. Communities use a variety of sources to meet matching fund requirements, including United Way, hospital foundations, in-kind contributions and other funds.

## What's the community's role?

No one agency or institution in a community can address all of the challenges faced by families today. Therefore, to address families' needs fully and to avoid duplication of effort, service providers and community residents must collaborate in the design and operation of an HFI program. Healthy Families Illinois should have its own identity in the community, yet be carefully interwoven in the existing fabric of community support, services and resources.

Community commitment to the program is demonstrated by ongoing linkage to other programs and agencies serving women and children and through local financial support. Hospitals and health care providers, local health departments, programs for young children and parent support services are important community partners in the development and operation of an HFI program.

## How can you learn more about HFI?

For information about Healthy Families Illinois or to obtain a current list of Illinois program sites, contact the DHS Office of Family Health at 1-217-782-2736 (voice) or 1-800-447-6404 (TTY).

DHS announces the availability of funds for new programs via its web address <[www.state.il.us/agency/dhs](http://www.state.il.us/agency/dhs)>. Competitive grant applications are solicited if funds for new programs are appropriated by the Illinois General Assembly.

For information on community presentations and conferences, contact Prevent Child Abuse Illinois at 1-217-522-1129.





DHS and HFI in partnership:

**Working Group** - DHS worked closely with child advocates, service providers and other interested groups to develop the HFI Working Group, which helps the department with policy development, program planning, implementation and evaluation. The Working Group has met quarterly since 1995. Membership is open to agencies, organizations and individuals with an interest in family support through home visiting. It is co-chaired by staff from DHS and Voices for Illinois Children, a statewide child advocacy organization.

**Training Institute** - The HFI Training Institute offers programs in basic and advanced home visiting, risk assessment, program supervision and other continuing education topics of interest to program staff. The training institute is operated by the Ounce of Prevention Fund.

**Program Evaluation Group** - DHS contracts with Northern Illinois University's Center for the Study of Family Violence and Sexual Assault to collect data for the HFI outcome evaluation. Families who voluntarily agree to be part of the study are referred to the Center by local HFI programs.

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